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ADDRESS TO THE CANADIAN RED CROSS

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BY

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When I was growing up in colonial British Guiana, my path was illuminated by three crosses in each of which I found great joy, in all of which I found much edification. The triple connection taught me a lot about the webbing nature of the world, the significance of which has come home to me with tremendous force in recent years.

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The first cross was that of Christianity which even in those days gave me a sense that the world was one. The second was that of the St. John's Ambulance whose work taught me something of local and instant compassion. The third was the Red Cross which helped me to understand heroic and compassionate internationalism. I have lived with a fondness for all three crosses over the last four decades and so I am deeply honored by your asking me to be with you today.

The world of the 1990s in which the Canadian Red Cross carries out its work is a world of in-betweenity. That is to say it lies between the era of the Cold war with its comfortable, if thundering, predictabilities and what is beginning to look very much like an era of contradiction, paradox and unsettling surprises. We are certainly moving into a new world but as of now there is little indication of a

new world order.

Contradiction, paradox, unsettling surprise: these are the messengers which tell us that history is not just changing gear but changing direction. Daunting to many of us who have to live through it all but not daunting to the Red Cross. For the Red Cross, in its hundred and thirty three years of existence, has lived and moved and had its being at the centre of the clash and clatter of big historical forces.

This goes back to your very origins. Henry Dunant, the Swiss young man in whose mind the idea of the Red Cross was born, in 1859, looked at a battlefield, that ultimate denial of humanity and saw its complete opposite: compassion--- that highest expression of humanity. For him and his colleagues who founded the ICRC an unwounded soldier was national; a wounded soldier was international. Compassion, like truth was indivisible.

The Movement which flowed from his inspiration, and of which the Canadian Red Cross is such a significant part, has developed a remarkable nervous system geared to caring for the fallen, the vulnerable and the unprotected in situations where contradictions abound, bewilderment is rife and contrarities proliferate.

Let us look for a moment at some of the contradictions and contrarities with which our present decade is riddled. 1992 is expected to see the consummation of the long and tortuous drive towards the unification of Western Europe. The underlying maxim of that

achievement would read like this: the unity of the whole is preferable to the absolute sovereignty of the parts.

Some recent signals are telling us that it is still a dicey matter. Or as we say of hockey matches, it is not over till it is over. But the movement towards unification signifies a profound conviction, namely: that for coping effectively with this end-of-millennium world the nation-state has radical limitations.

But when we cast our eyes over to the eastern end of Europe, we see the opposite impetus at work. There the maxim clearly is: the sovereignty of the parts is preferable to the unity of the whole. The old Soviet Union owes its collapse to that principle. What we used to call Yugoslavia is in the throws of a civil war because of it. The same dismantling urge is at work in parts of India, in Sri Lanka, in Somalia. The reason is not far to seek. Those devoted to carving smaller sovereignties out of the bigger ones see the nation state as a kind of sacrament: an inviolate outward and visible sign of an inner and spiritual uniqueness.

But here we go down another road of contradiction. Many countries of the world are today multi-ethnic, multi-cultural societies, Canada being one of the most interesting, because one of the most successful, examples. From France there comes a most significant statistic: There are now more practicing Muslims in France than there are practicing Christians. Yet at the same time, the opposite tendency is in full and frenetic manifestation elsewhere. The most extreme form of it is the



"ethnic cleansing" now going on in the former Yugoslavia.

But its expressions are not all extreme. Many sober, thoughtful people in various parts of the world are saying that both the old communist ideal of universal solidarity and the Western free-enterprise ideal of individualism have pushed to the margins a deep and potent psychic force: ethnic identity. That force is now returning centre stage and demanding to be noticed. Those moved by it are convinced that only political expression will give it the respect it deserves. And not a few of them take political expression all the way to statehood. Their credo can be summed up in three phrases: one culture, one people, one nation.

In passing I may remark that as a teenager in British Guiana I was exposed to a presumptuous example of the same kind of thinking writ large. Rebel that I was, I found myself in frequent collision with imperial assumptions. And I was as frequently put down with the maxim that "truth is indivisible and clearly British."

But let us go one step further and set this mood in a larger context, the context of global society. Powerful currents are at work converting the many worlds humankind has hitherto inhabited into one world. The spread of the global economy, the growing need for planetary housekeeping, the pervasiveness of modern communications are drawing us all into the same web.



That last one, modern communications, is a double-edged instrument. Yes, everywhere becomes here and here becomes everywhere so that we cannot shut out either the sufferings or the concerns of our fellows on the other side of the planet. That is to the good. But, what is not good is that those same communications are giving terrifying impetus to the drive to homogenize humanity. Many cultures are under bombardment to abandon their identity, to borrow their souls and not just their wardrobes from foreign quarters. The attack is coming from outer space.

Satellites, owned by mega-corporations beyond our control can beam down upon the peoples of the planet whatever they choose. And what they choose too often has an advertising agenda selling the dreams, appetites and life-style of one particular ethic: the consumer culture. Nor do the advertisers scruple to traduce the deepest spiritual resources of our western civilization for their unabashedly unspiritual ends.

Let me give you one bizarre example. The TV screen depicts a dinner plate revolving like a record, with a wiener threading it like a needle. Music issues from this activity and it is the music of Handel's Alleluia Chorus. The message: the easiest way to the beatific vision which raptured Handel to compose the Chorus is the wiener way. Mysticism begins and ends in sausage.

But in the face of this assault the deep biological instinct to preserve diversity is asserting itself. Old cultures, even those

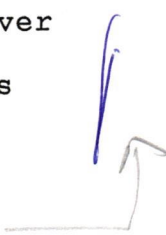
indigenous ones that seemed set for extinction, are seeking once again their pristine vitality. They are reminding us that they prefer to be custodians of their own sacred fires and masters in the households of their spirit. To some this means a ethnically homogeneous nation-state. To others it means a state that is a house of many ethnic mansions.

Observant people are now saying that the nation state is too small to solve the big problems it has to deal with and too big to solve the small problems it faces. It goes without saying that the earth's environmental problems are not divisible and cannot be effectively addressed by individual states. Whether a state is a super power or a power less than super it is still too small to cope with environmental perplexities that arise beyond its borders. Those perplexities require the concerted efforts of the international community operating through its various organizations. The earth will surely burn if nation states insist on playing lone fiddle.

Too big to solve the small problems. Those "small problems" are not really small at all. For they involve large numbers of people seeking mechanisms to solve their community problems and not finding them in the organs of state. Large bureaucracies are seldom equipped to identify with those problems. They need specialised expertise born of local knowledge and insight expressed through agencies and operations arising from the communities themselves. But large bureaucracies can and should create the facilitating contexts within which those agencies and operations can strengthen their structures and enhance their

capabilities. Often to de-centralize is to revitalise.

And here the voluntary organizations, the NGOs and peoples organizations, become indispensable. They release the energies, creative, organizational, imaginative, entrepreneurial, of ordinary citizens. They encourage in citizens a taste for problem-solving. And so they replace a feeling of helplessness over against the faceless machine of the state with the confidence of growing participation. Participation brings to people the satisfaction of greater control over their own lives. In short, a sense of healthy power. Healthy power is power shared, far and away the most fertile seedbed of a sense of responsibility for one's community.



Equally important, the Red Cross, and organizations like it, bring the quality of compassion to the release of citizens' energies. And compassion is two parts empathy and two parts imagination. For it takes the imagination to put ourselves in the skin of a person suffering from some dreaded disease or of a victim of injustice, war, or famine.

Not surprisingly, the great compassionate figures of history, like Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, Gutama Buddha, Maimonedes, Mahatma Ghandi, William Wilberforce, Dr. Bethune, Jean Vanier were people of tremendous imagination. And it took not only took the form of identification with those who suffered but in finding effectively practical ways to deal with the causes of the suffering. In some of them the imagination burned with a political flame, a flame that ignited in others the concentration, the passion and the strategies to



alter the texture of their societies.

Compassion is therefore not just an admirable characteristic of bleeding hearts. It is a great unifier bringing together head and heart, spirit and mind, in a way that, until recently was not supposed to be legitimate in our Western scientific and putatively rational culture.

Where compassion and creativity go together there usually follows organization - the triumph of method over impulse. Method in analysis, in policy making, in planning, in matching means with ends, and in preparedness for contingency. In short, an agency like the Red Cross becomes a centre of decision making within society thus contributing to a robust autonomy of citizens's activities.

Civil society brings to political society those springs of compassion which flow from NGOs like the Red Cross. For where the principle of competition is enthroned, there must also be enthroned as co-sovereign the instinct of compassion. In competition there must be losers, and in classically competitive societies an uncomfortable number lose tremendously and tragically. If those are denied compassion the whole society is the poorer. For they become victims either of apathy or of apoplexy. If of apathy they lose the vital mainsprings of communal energy and initiative; and if of apoplexy their energy and initiative curdle into anger and violence.

A caring society such as the Red Cross seeks to engender is the nursery

of the kind of hard-knuckled hope which enables the losers to discover more power in themselves than they thought they had as well as more capacity for organising than others ascribed to them. It is also fertile soil for the reforming personality, the people of vision who seek to make the whole society more just by making the operation of its institutions more equitable.

A few minutes ago I mentioned that Henry Dunant and his colleagues who founded the International Committee of the Red Cross believed that compassion like truth was indivisible. A century and a third of history has confirmed how right they were. We, taking our cues from them, would add to the word "indivisible" the late twentieth century word "global".

That is the bedrock on which the Red Cross movement stands. Another way of putting it is that disaster is indivisible and what diminishes my fellow humans also diminishes me. In short neither calamity nor compassion can be bottled up in national boundaries. And if we ever needed proof of this our planet is more than willing to supply it. One touch of an Exxon Valdez oil spill makes the whole world kin - in disaster.

"Indivisible" and "global". Lets stay with those words a while. You may remember my talking a minute or two ago about the crucial significance of citizens' organizations to the health of any society. Those organizations have evolved over the years a talent for networking with strong circuits for the flow of information and the sharing of skills. All of which greatly enhance their confidence, as they seek to

educate the public and be the conscience of the political order.

In many Western countries they have become the Third Estate, respectable centres of power, acknowledged and often consulted by governments, possessing considerable expertise. Their importance worldwide was dramatically demonstrated by the Rio Summit, a summit of two peaks: The official one composed of heads and members of governments and the unofficial one composed of peoples' organizations.

The networking of the latter at Rio was a symptom of one of the most important developments of our time: citizen diplomacy. That is the intermeshing of voluntary organizations across national boundaries: civil society gone regional or global. Modern communications are making this more and more possible. Not only are NGO personnel able to travel and meet one another more frequently. But videos can relay messages between community groups of all sorts in different parts of the world. Computers are rapidly ceasing to be the toys of elites and are becoming the enablers of solidarity between poor peoples across regions - a tremendous spur to literacy.

Citizen diplomacy began during the Cold War. Groups of people on both sides of the old Iron Curtain, alarmed at the obsessive way in which the two sides danced at the fringes of apocalypse, began to make contact with one another in the interests of peacemaking. Although it was dangerous for some of them they persisted and the contacts gained in strength as they gained in numbers.



They included both ordinary and prominent citizens who often used the umbrella of cultural contacts to strengthen one another in the delicate art of persuading to peace those who had a fixation with war. When the Cold War began to thaw the politicians on both sides found to their satisfaction ready made constituencies for the complicated task of dismantling the iron rigidities of forty years.

Citizen diplomacy had demonstrated its usefulness. It was to gain even greater impetus from crisis of the planetary environment. Considerably before the Brundtland Commission Report arrested the thinking world with its warnings, citizens on the ground in many countries had been forming into groups. Their aim: to protect their neck of the natural world and to alert the authorities to rapine inflicted on nature by public policies.

The Chipko Movement is a classic example of this. In 1973 in one of the states of northern India, a group of village women chained themselves to trees to prevent their menfolk, who were in the employ of a large corporation, from cutting them down. From these humble but heroic beginnings there arose a movement, gathering strength as it gathered allies, which has achieved national proportions in India. It is now powerful enough to insist that state governments consult it when they are embarking on programs with environmental implications.

But the custodial energies and widening horizons of groups like the Chipko Movement were bound to spill across national boundaries. By the late 1980s they were beginning to link up with their counterparts

regionally and internationally, assisted by environmental and developmental NGOs in the richer countries of the North.

They see themselves as members of an earth community, not just as citizens of a particular sovereignties. And they are convinced that the fate of the earth community is too precious to be left entirely in the hands of national governments. Most significantly, the great international organizations, like the UN, the World Bank and the IMF, increasingly find that their thinking is incomplete without the inputs of NGOs.

The assurance that they have allies across the world, some of them with access to the media in influential countries, fortifies their determination to pressure their governments to tread environmentally and with due respect for human rights. It also strengthens their tenacity in the face of official resistance or indifference. And as they lobby and pressure with greater confidence so both leaders and supporters learn the nuances and intricacies of political action.

One of the most important lessons that citizen diplomacy is teaching its practitioners is this: to be effective locally you have to be plugged in globally. That is perhaps the most hopeful pointer for the future of this planet. Especially at a time when we are faced with the awesome paradox I mentioned earlier: just when we should be outgrowing the swaddling bands of national sovereignty, many of our fellows feel the need to return to them.

What that return will mean most obviously is that the number of small states will increase. But as those states wrestle with the limitations of individual sovereignty imposed by the very nature of today's world both governments and their citizens will seek to be in larger company.

The pace and quality of their seeking will be greatly enhanced by the diplomacy of their citizens. For once the latter are convinced that their cultural uniqueness is no longer at risk, that they are indeed guardians of their own sacred fires, then the impetus to collaboration and common action with their counterparts on the other side of the borders will gain strength.

This is crucial for a ordered world. Someone recently said that while the twentieth century has by and large made the world safe for diversity, the twenty first century will have to make diversity safe for the world. We have certainly abandoned the comfortable assumption that where cultures are concerned proximity necessarily leads to appreciation. Certainly this is not true where disparities of power or of economic means exist.

On the other hand security is the mature mother of cultural receptiveness and sometimes of cultural cross-pollination. And here citizens' initiatives are more likely to precede than follow those of the state. Especially if citizens on both sides are convinced that in the face of a common threat they would lose too much by failure to make common cause. The pervasive common threat is the collapse of the



natural environment - the threat that has given citizen diplomacy its strongest raison d' etre.

If our diversities are going to make us spiritually richer and ecologically wiser, then we will have to invent political arrangements which go far beyond the nation state, which link the local, the communal and the ethnic to the global and international. Political arrangements, that is, which foster both the vitality and inter-action of communities of culture as well as the vitality and regenerative capabilities of the earth .

Without the active involvement of citizens in the creation and working of such entities they will be critically short of sap and even of sapience. But the active involvement of citizens at those various levels represents something as fundamental as a watershed of history. You see, in both national and international affairs we are crossing over from the age of Newton to the age of Einstein.

In Newton's universe, the sun, the centre, held all the planets by gravitation revolving around it in mathematical precision. No room there for independent directions of local energy. In contrast, Einstein's universe is full of self-generating electrical fields which can combine and coalesce or separate and re-align. In short a universe of constant creativity and many sources of energy.

Politically, Newton's model would have governments or supra-national organizations sweeping all civil activities into their fields of

gravitation - with civil society as a chattering but acquiescent client to those olympian patrons. Einstein's model would have non-governmental groups, profit and non-profit, analogous to the fields of electrical energy, free to generate new ideas, to experiment and to innovate. Their activities would not be peripheral but central to the functioning of the whole political or international system. Their very fluidity, the enemy of civic deadness or political leadenness, would a major source of stability .

All of this gives new and more urgent meaning to the motto of the Red Cross League "Per Humanitatem ad Pacem" - "Through Humanity to Peace." That motto places the foundations of any world order, not based on the flexing of missiles, firmly on human values. That is on the sacredness of human life, on the preciousness of human diversity, on human respect for the integrity of nature, on the right of people to envisage and pursue alternatives to the status quo, and on the pursuit of justice.

The guidelines adopted by the Red Cross Movement in 1984 state that among the things which promote a lasting peace are "a fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet the needs of peoples." Those words rightly put social and economic justice, within nations and between nations, at the heart of the Movement's concerns. The best definition of justice I know is "compassion expressed in the way society is organised."

By society I refer not only to national societies but to global society; to our present international order so lop-sided that it can

only be described as an imperilling disequilibrium. For while less than 20% of the world's people consume 80% of its substance, one billion people lack safe water to drink, and one in three children is malnourished, and nearly three million children die annually of diseases that could be prevented by immunization. All this at a time when more money flows now from South to North in debt repayment than from North to South in development assistance.

Such a pervasive absence of justice threatens our civilization by threatening our planetary home. For the few who are rich consume the earth by excess and the many who are poor consume it by need. For all peoples, therefore, to survive is to achieve justice, making it the bedrock on which a new world order rests.

An undertaking so almighty, and so people oriented, demands strong alliances across the world of citizens' organizations, with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies moving in a large company of NGOs of all descriptions, ahead of their political leaders and pulling them on. For make no mistake about it, the signs are firmly pointing to a revolution in the relations between the leaders and the led - a revolution that can best be summed up by Ghandi's famous quip: "there go my followers; I must catch up with them for I am their leader"

In the Talmud there is a passage which says that when God created the world he deliberately left an area of chaos so that humankind would be challenged to bring order to it and thus share with Him in the



creation. That story has never been more pointed and pertinent than in this last decade of the 20th century.

In 1863 the Red Cross idea took shape to tackle the chaos that war was bringing to Europe. In the 1990s the Red Cross of Canada in alliance with the other national Red Cross and Red crescent Societies as well as in company with a host of NGOs across the globe have to tackle the chaos which an unbalanced international economic system brings to the world.

That means setting to work all the talent for pulling extremes into the middle and for flexible implementation which have made the Canadian contribution to international affairs so distinctive in the last half-century. Making "impossible" combinations work is a very Canadian thing. We call it, most unsuitably, by an unheroic name: "living in the grey area."

But Margaret Sommerville, a professor of Ethics and Law at McGill University has persuasively suggested that the "grey area" should be renamed " the purple-pink" area. Purple and pink suggest the guts of heroism and the fire of the imagination, the capacity to take risks, to live with uncertainty, and yet to plan, to organise, to implement both at the local and at the global levels. Those are the qualities we need to contribute to the creation of a new world order in which there is room for all and where what we do for the health of Canada we do also for the health of our planet.